

May 10, 2006

Good Morning. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Jeffrie Cape and I am a licensed social worker with over 20 yrs of clinical experience. In the last 12 years my particular expertise has been in working with men who are abusive to their partners. I was on the Governor's task force to develop batterer intervention standards in Michigan and am on the board of the Batterer Intervention Services Coalition of Michigan (BISC-MI), where I was a founding member and past chair. Currently, in addition to my private practice, I work as a facilitator for ADA (Alternatives to Domestic Aggression) in Washtenaw County and I run HEAL (Helping Explore Accountable Lifestyles) a 52 session batterer intervention program in Oakland Community Corrections, which provides service to over 60 men.

My concern in looking over this package of bills is that it creates the illusion of safety and accountability, but provides neither. When men coerce or threaten their partners and are able to get compliance or as many if they prefer to call it, obedience, they have created a structure in the relationship making it difficult for the woman to speak up for herself. If she does, she can be assured there will be consequences. These consequences escalate if the man believes his partner is moving away from him and/or is getting advice or information from an outside person or place that he has not approved.

I wish that I could tell you that the men I work with are psychopaths or are easily identifiable in society, but the reality is that they are from every age, race, educational, economic and social background.

I can understand the theory that having the threat of consequences will change batterers' behavior. Besides having concerns about the practicality of implementation of the sanctions described in these bills, my experience is that batterers wouldn't believe that their actions are the ones being addressed. Most every batterer I have worked with came in telling me that they had known, since childhood that it was wrong to hit women, but it didn't stop them from doing it.

Recently I had a young man who was in the program and knew that it was against the law to hit his partner. This information and the fact that he was already on probation did not stop him from hitting his partner when he felt she was "way out of line".

These bills not only don't account for a batterer's ability to retaliate, they actually give him another system to use against her. Since they put the onus of responsibility on the victims, it means the batterer will use anything he can to get her to withdraw the charges or change her testimony.

Batterers are very skilled at using systems against their partners because it helps justify their actions. For example: there was the man who called his wife's Doctor. before her appointment (which he had found out about by putting spyware into her PDA) and told the Doctor he was concerned about her mental status. He suggested that she might need medication and that she was very unreliable and had been hurting herself. The result was

that the Doctor did not take seriously the women's bruises and when she came home and told her husband the Doctor suggested she might need some medication to help her cope, he told her that this proved that the difficulties in the marriage were her fault. There was also the man who refused to pay the Doctor's bills and denied his partner access to money. This prevented her from being able to go back and see a Doctor who had suspected she might be being abused and had given her some written literature, which this man had found.

I want to stress that the examples I am sharing did not come from women or victim advocates, but from the batterers themselves.

I have worked with men who beat their partners to induce miscarriage when they felt she wasn't going to get an abortion. Two of them succeeded in inducing a miscarriage. Neither of them was arrested for it. Their partners were too scared to report it to anyone.

Plea bargains and reduced charges are already extremely prevalent and often support a batterer's beliefs that he really didn't do anything wrong. Batterers' behavior is strategic, purposeful and self serving. Their perceptions are often distorted and this leads to making choices that put their partners at risk. Many men have reported to me that when they were in jail they reinforced their belief that it was their partner's fault they were there, by planning the revenge they were going to exact when they were released.

An example of this distorted thinking is a man who came into the HEAL program and initially told us that his wife of 20 yrs had called the police for no reason. After having him get a copy of the police report, he told us that he had threatened her with a BB gun. Last week, over 20 weeks into the program, he finally admitted that he had actually threatened her with a .38, but when the police came in and saw the BB gun he let them believe that was what he had used.

Often in a group an individual will be challenged about something he has done in group, like intimidate another group member. The batterer will be so distorted in his perception that the fact that 14 other men and a trained facilitator all saw the same thing and came to the same conclusion does not move him from his perception that his actions were reasonable and appropriate. I often ask the group to imagine what it must feel like to be that man's partner and to attempt to address an issue with him alone.

I am glad that you want to hold batterers accountable and keep women safer, but I am afraid that these bills will actually make it less safe for many women. There are so many things that could be done to hold batterers accountable, for instance we have had standards for batterer intervention programs for 10 yrs, but have yet to make them enforceable. I hope you will continue your efforts to find ways to hold batterers accountable I know the DV community including BISC-MI would be open to working with you to find ways that are viable and effective.

Thank you for your time.

5/08/06

To whom it might concern:

I am writing this letter in regards to the law that is being tabled about prolonging an abortion if a female is being forced to have one. My name is Scott and I attended the 52 week heal program for 65 weeks. I learned to identify many different tactics and other forms of abuse I wasn't aware I was using. The first thing I will say is we use these tactics because they work. For example, your favorite fishing lure, it's your favorite because it works. Our first concern would be if the victim would ever tell that she was being forced for fear of retaliation. If for some reason the victim chose to tell would there be any safe house, protection, ect? Here's a question I have. If this law does go into affect what makes anybody think the victim will still be alive in 48hrs to have an abortion? When you chose to abuse the furthest thing from your mind is concerns about a lawsuit much less anything else. We want what we want right now at all costs meaning that we will use what ever works. I have first hand experience on this. My now ex-wife got pregnant during the beginning of building our new home. I was expecting a lot of help manually from her. My first statements were you need to go get an abortion now. She refused. Looking back now could I have forced her? No doubt in my mind. But I chose not to. Would she have told the doctor she was being forced to have it done? Not a chance. I know I speak from experience. This will not hold men accountable. Thank you Scott.